SOCIO-ECONOMIC LIFE IN MITHILĀ UNDER THE KHAṆḌAVALĀS

By

Dr. Upendra Thakur

Society in mediaeval Mithilā, like mediaeval India, presented the picture of a feudal structure with the king or the Rājā at its head. There was a vast difference in standard of living amongst different classes of people. While the nobles and the zamindars rolled in wealth and extravagances, the lot of the lower classes was hard and they faced chronic economic depression and oppression.

The distinctive feature of the Hindu society during the period was the system of castes and sub-castes as it is to-day. With the advent of Islam and with the fall of the old time ruling classes the position of the legal and formal powers of the Brāhmaṇas had no doubt undergone a considerable change but on the whole with the elimination of the moral rivalry of the Kṣatriyas, the authority and personnel influence of the Brāhmaṇas increased among the Hindu classes. This naturally led to even more restricting of caste-rules and a wider caste-jurisdiction in marriage and diet and a few other spheres that were left to them. Thus, the introduction of Islam was not a 'fundamental revolution in the basic conditions of Indian life', for though it affected a change in classes and their relative position, it could not uproot the old institutions and as such Mithilā or Tirhut still continued to be a stronghold of Brāhmaṇism, averse to all such changes and influences accruing from the new Order that came to dominate other parts of India. In fact, in this part of the country Islam practically succumbed to the spirit of class-division and forgot all about the message of Qurān. It is true, contact between the Hindus and the Muslims grew : the Muslims offered *pūjās* at the Hindu temples and the Hindus offered *sini* at the mosques, but the inherent difficulties could not be slackened and this so-called intermingling continued to be confined only to the lower strata of the society.

The advent of western civilisation also did not bring any material change in its wake and the Maithila society remained almost the same as it was before. There have been no substantial changes in the mode of the life of the people who inhabit this land and who cling fast to their ancient ways of manners. It has been rightly observed that "Mithilā, a

country with an ancient history, traditions of which it retains to the present day, is a land under the domination of a sept of Brāhmaṇas, extraordinarily devoted to the mint, anise and cummin of the law. For centuries it has been a tract too proud to admit other nationalities to intercourse on equal terms, and has passed through conquest after conquest from the north, from the east and from the west without changing its ancestral peculiarities."[1] This Brāhmaṇical domination has left ineffaceable marks upon the nature of the rest of the population.

The same age-old castes still dominated the land. They were the Maithila Brāhmaṇas, the Maithila Kāyasthas, Goālas, Bābhans or Bhūmihāras, Dosādhs, Koirīs, Kurmīs, Chamārs, Dhānukas, Mallāhs, Nuniās, Tāntis, Telīs, Rājputs and several other castes in Muzaffarpur and Darbhanga, Saharasa and Purnea. Of the Mohammadans, the Sheikhs, the Jolahas, the Dhunias and the Kunjaras were numerous, and they all belonged to the same linguistic group.

The condition of the villages in Mithilā or Tirhut has been generally wretched all through the ages and the character of the people on the whole has been profoundly influenced by their geographical isolation. In the days of the Muhammadan invasion the river Gaṇḍaka proved to be a curiously strong barrier. While the countries to the west of the Gaṇḍaka and south of the Gaṅgā were constantly subjected to the turbulent influences that came in the wake of the Muslim rule, the country of Mithilā remained more or less at peace under the Hindu Rājās.[2] The results are obvious to all who are acquainted with the districts of Champaran, Purnea, Darbhanga and Muzaffarpur. Although the inhabitants of the Hajipur sub-division have naturally assimilated some of the characteristics of their near neighbours in Patna and Saran, it is still clear that the people of Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur, Purnea and Saharsa and Champaran are more backward and less enterprising than the people of the rest of the country.

The structure of the Hindu society as a whole presented the age-old spectacle with the same Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas and Śūdras constituting its vital limbs with their privileges and traditions intact, inspite of ruthless hammering of Islam and numerous sake-ups from without. The laws of Manu had still no sympathy for the downtrodden fraction of the society and the Brāhmaṇas resisted for long the foreign influences with all their resources and succeeded to a considerable extent

1. G. A. Grierson, Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. V, pt. II, p. 4.
2. For details, see HM, Chaps. V-VI (History of Mithilā by Upendra Thakur)

in their ceaseless efforts with the result that Mithilā remained the least influenced tract with little to gain from the new light that flashed all over the horizon of the country.

Of the various castes and sub-castes, the Brāhmaṇas, though not so strong numerically, were by far the most important caste owing to their hereditary priestly influences. The majority belonged to the Maithila or *Tirhutiyā* sub-caste which was again divided into five hypergamous groups—*Śrotriyas* or *Soti*, *Joga* or *Yogya*, *Pañjibadhs*, *Jaibāra* and *Nāgara*. These different groups still carry on in the same manner as they were enjoined to do when these sub-classes came into existence with the introduction of the famous Maithila *Pañji* in the time of Harisiṁhadeva, the last king of the Karṇāṭa dynasty of Mithilā.[3]

The Pañjī

This new social organisation constitutes a land mark in the social history of Mithilā. Introduced some six hundred years ago, it still dominates the Maithila society with all its devastating effects and implication. It has been held by some Maithila scholars that "it was primarily a measure of social reorganisation designed to conserve the purity of the Maithila race and to uphold the distinctive characteristics of Maithila culture, but it set up such new standards of social values that in effect it revolutioned the entire outlook of society and shaped the future destiny of Mithilā in such a manner and to such an extent that even the twentieth century is not yet free from its influences......the measure got so stabilised that it has weathered, in course of six hundred years and more, all the storms that have flown over Mithilā without its roots being shaken, much less uprooted".[4]

We have elsewhere fully discussed this aspect of the Maithila social life and shown that this so-called re-constitution of the society, instead of bringing them together, split them up into so many warring camps, each section trying to beat down the other, whenever such opportunity presented of itself. This new institution was solely responsible for all the evils—namely the monster of *Bikauās*, the *Kulīns*, the *Ghaṭakas*, etc.—that soon crept in and began to eat into the vitality of the society which was gradually turned into a mess of crude monstrocities.[5] How far it "revolutionised the entire outlook of the society and shaped the future destiny

3. For details see HM, Chap. VII.
4. Sūktimuktāvalī, ed. R. N. Jha, Intro. 30.
5. For details, see HM., Chap. VII.

of Mithilā" we do not know; how far it conserved "the purity of Maithila race" is also doubtful and what "tremendous fillip" the "ideals" received is just not known but there is no doubt that it has "weathered in course of six hundred years and more all the storms" and therein only lies the success of this so-called social revolution.

Any reform, be it social or political, is deemed to be successful only when it brings in its wake all that is good, all that is life-giving to the society as a whole. A reform, howsoever, well-inspired, has demoralising and degenerating effects if it benifits only a section of the society. Great and stabilising reforms always come from the bottom : they never come from the top. Reforms, when imposed, become an object of resistance and hatred, and defeat the very object of its creation. This was exactly the case with the social reforms introduced by king Harisiṁhadeva of Mithilā in A. D. 1313 when the much trumpeted *Pañji* was compiled and edited by Maithila scholars by his order.[6]

Some scholars have acclaimed the *Pañjī* as "the crowning act"[7] of the age which was, and has been, never excelled before and after. What is surprising is that unable to shake off their own deep-rooted prejudices they outright dismiss others' views as a product of ingnorance and bias and try to confuse the outside world by claiming that the *Pañji* is the only source of social history of Mithilā and whatever Harisiṁha ordained is to be explicitly followed from birth to death without raising doubts or murmur or protest whatever. To them it is a divine document like the mediaeval theory of divine right of Kingship, a law unto itself, which is to be obeyed, never to be questioned. But from a close and impartial study of the *Pañjī*, it is clear that it was a reactionary measure introduced by the feudal lord of the erstwhile feudal state which stood in the way of the all-round social progress of the Maithilas at large though it tremendously benifitted a tiny section of the sociery that now champions its cause. It had, no doubt, some intrinsic values in as much as it preserved faithfully the geneological lists of the Maithilas but on the whole it also encouraged fissiparous tendencies proving detrimental to the genuine interest of the society in course of centuries. We have not gone into the details of the merits and demerits of this social reform here, for we have already descussed its various aspects fully and compassionately elsewhere.[8]

As regards the customs and usages the Hindu society inspite of

---

6. Ibid.
7. SM, Intro. 29.
8. HM, Chap. VII.

the influx of the foreign elements---Muslim and western—witnessed no remarkable change during this period. The most ancient creed of four *āśramas* still lingered amongst the higher-ups for we are told that Mm. Maheśa Ṭhākura, the founder-rājā of the Khaṇḍavalā dynasty took to asceticism towards the end of his life after having entrusted the administration of the country to Gopāla Ṭhākura.[9] But, it appears that the practice has now almost died out, as we do not get any other notable instance in the later period.

Commission of suicides, as expiation of penances, was also in vogue in some form or other. There are instances, though few, of persons committing suicide as a penance for murder and other such crimes. Acyuta Ṭhākura, son of Mm. Maheśa Ṭhākura, is said to have started on ***mahāprasthāna*** (The Great Pilgrimage) to the Himālayas, according to the Śāstric injunctions as a penance for pillaging and Plundering Amarāvatī and massacring the Brāhmaṇas thereof.[10]

The Position of Women

The condition of women was quite unsatisfactory and they were wholly subject to and guided by the dictates of their lords and were always confined within the limits of their houses. They were not allowed to expose themselves publicly as it was regarded as the worst dishonour. Devoid of her husband's protection a chaste woman had no other place where she could live in peace and happiness and she could not even go to her father's house without his consent.

Women of the higher castes practiced purdāh. The rigidity of the purdāh system was responsibile for their being subjected to gruesome social tyranny as their very appearance in the public came to be treated as the most shocking scandal. In other words, they were even denied the right of breathing fresh air and were like so many prisoner huddled together in their house-prisons. The Hindus adopted the custom from the Muhammadans under the stress of circumstances which in turn brought about their social, political and intellectual stagnation. The system was so rigidly followed that it has been noted by Jāyasī, Caitanyadeva and Vidyāpati. Infact, seclusion now came to be regarded as a sign of respect and nobility. Husbands forbade their wives the very sight of strangers. But, this coercive purdāh system had no place among the Hindu lower middle class and the general masses. It was every where a common sight to see

9. M. Jha, pp. 74-75.

10. For details see Thakur, History of Suicide in India, Chap. IV.

women water-carriers walking along the streets without any purdāh. Even the spread of English education and western imfluences which succeeded in enlightening and emancipating the women of other parts of the country from the chains of age-old slavery, succumbed to the rigid hierarchical pretensions and worn-out conventions in Mithilā.

Marriage was more a family-question than a personal concern of the marrying people, and early marriage or child-marriage was the order of the day. Girls were married before the age of puberty and had no voice in the choice of their husbands. They had no liberty to protest, in words and deeds, aganist the inexorable laws of society, and "with conscience and feelings deeply wounded, they would only weep and occasionally murmur among themselves." This practice was common among the kings as well as commoners. The institution of the child-marriage was so deep-rooted that it could not be ablished inspite of various legislations : western influences have no doubt slackened its rigidity to a considerable extent, yet Scrafton's observations about Bengal hold partially good even to-day so far as Mithilā is concerned.[11]

The Institution of Kulīnism

Side by side with child-marriage, truimphant Kulīnism and dowry system increased during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth centuries in Mithilā. We have elsewhere discussed the narrow and rigid institution of Kulīnism; the creation of sub-classes in the Brāhmaṇa hierarchy, the rise of the *Bikauās* and other institutions like the *Ghaṭakas*, the *Pañjīkāras* and etc. in the Maithila society.[12] Kulīnism in this age proved monstrous and produced shoking abuses, as poligamy became a regular habit with these so-called *Kulīns* of *Bhalamānusas* (people of high birth) who demanded a substantial dowry in every marriage as a matter of right. They had now turned the sacred institution of marriage into a hereditary profession, and we have it on record that they normally married twenty-five to thirty wives, and even more. The question of sincere attachment on their part was simply talked out : money and more money was the only demand of these frivolous. unmatched illiterate and uncouth husbands. Poor and helpless girls remained mostly in their fathers' houses where their husbands came once in two or three years only to exact their dues from their father-in-law.

11. Scrafton, Reflections on the Government of Indostan, pp. 10-11

12. For details, see HM, Chap. VI.

Though early marriage was generally the rule, yet in the case of Kulīn's daughter the rule was very often violated. Her parents were bound to wait till they could collect sufficient money for their daughters' dowry. Sometimes from financial considerations, a girl of eleven or twelve was handed over as a wife to a grey-haired *Bikauā* (one who had adopted marriage as his profession). This dowry system was, however, not compulsory and never so shocking among the fortunate non-kulīns. Sometimes among the lower classes the practice was exactly the opposite, because among them the bride-groom had to pay a dowry to the bride.

The number of widows grew staggeringly awful. The death of one ***Kulīn*** or ***Bhalamānusa*** naturally caused the widowhood of atleast thirty to forty women.[13] The corrupt and degraded Kulīns were till recently highly honoured because of their birth in the so-called high *Kula*, though they generally happened to be illiterate and foolish. The position of the helpless widows in the society was deplorable and at certain places it came to be regarded as inauspicious to have a look at their face. They were an object of hatred, never to be respected by the society.

Widow-marriage, though prevalent among the lower order, was strictly prohibited among the higher castes. Iswhar Chandra Vidyāsāgra was the first social reformer who raised his strong voice against these scandalous social injustice in Bengal and elsewhere. As a result of this strong movement widows were given legal right to marry and their issues legal rights to inherit property. But Mithilā, the land of excessive orthodoxy, completely ruled out any such reform and remained unaffected by these changes and movements.

Satī was an established institution during this period and it continued to flourish as before inspite of several attempts made by Akbar and Jahangir to suppress or regulate the rite. The Brāhmaṇa priest played a prominent part in *Satī* sacrifices. A woman, who was about to practice *satī*, was not allowed to be touched and thus defiled by a non-Hindu. The queen of Rājā Puruṣottama Ṭhākura of the Khaṇḍavalā dynasty is said to have practiced *satī* on the death of her husband; Rāghava-priyā, the wife of Rājā Rāghava Siṁha also burnt herself to death on the funeral pyre of her husband. There is yet a *Satī* temple (*Maṭha*) extant on the place of her funeral to the south of ***Bhaurāgarhī*** (the fortress of Bhaura). There are no images of gods in

13. In certain provinces girls to the number of a hundred or two were married to one man (Cf. R. G. Bhandarkar. Collected Work, Vol. II, pp. 468-70.

the temple except two small clay-mounds. There is also a big tank there known as *satīāḍa* which people of the surrounding villages call goddess *Satī-māi* (Mother Satī) and worship her as village goddess. But it seems that the practice was confined only to the Brāhmaṇas and the Kṣatriyas and was not so widely current in Mithilā as in Bengal and elsewhere. Instances of *Jouhar* during this period have also come to light.[14]

The *Sabhāgāchī* marriage was yet another peculiar but important aspect of Maithila social life which has no parallel else where. The institution of *Sabhāgāchī* at the Sauraṭha village got great impetus during this period. It is situated to the east of the famous Mādhaveśvara Śiva temple of Sauraṭha, about four miles west of Madhubani where Maithila Brāhmaṇas from all over the country assemble in thousands once in a year to negotiate the marriage of their sons and daughters. Formerly, the Sabhā used to be held somewhere near the Samaulī village, but latter in the time of Rājā Rāghava Siṁha it was shifted to the present site where with the generous grant of Rājā Rāghava Siṁha, a *Sabhā* house was built and since then it has been held there uninterruptedly. Latter Rājā Mādhava Siṁha excavated a big tank, built a temple and *Dharmśālā*, for the convinience of the negotiators. The temple was, however, completed in the time of Rājā Chatra Siṁha, his son and successor. It was thus a big social gathering which was responsible for the birth of the institutions of the *Ghaṭakas* (the marriage-contractors) and the *Pañjikāras*. These instit utions have now unfortunately lost their past sacred character and become an object of ridicule among the more progressive section of the society.[15]

Slavery

Slavery was an established institution in Mithilā during the period of which we have hardly a parallel elsewhere. From various accounts we learn that this evil infested the Maithila society in all its nakedness. The slaves were a product of the feudal order, had nothing of their own and were completely at the mercy of their owners who could dipose of them as they pleased to, like so many commodities. From various kinds of State-papers, judgements, grant-deeds, slave-deeds and contracts, known as *Gaurīva-Cāṭikāpatras*, *Bahī-Khātās*, *Ajātapatras* or *Cāṭilas*, *Akarārapatras*, or *Janauḍhī* and *Nistārapatras*,[16] it is clear that it was a deep-rooted insti-

14. Fof details see Thakur, History of Suicide in India, Chap. IV.

15. For details see Thakur, History of Mithilā; Vol. II, Chap. V (MS.).

16. For a detailed account of these various papers, see my article "The Institution of Slavery in Mithilā" JBRS,, 1959 & IHQ, 1958.

tution in the mediaeval age as well as in the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century. These documents record the sale, gift and emancipation of the slaves or servants. They are unique in the sense that we hardly come across such elaborate documents relating to slavery in any other part of the world.

Sometimes the question of actual ownership of slaves involved title-suits and one such case was actually fought and judgment given in conformity with the ancient legal texts by the Judge of Mithilā. This judgment was delivered by Mm. Sacala Miśra[17] and is one of the rare documents relating to a case arising out of the question of ownership of the slaves in śaka 1716 (=1794 A. D.) *i. e.*, twenty-nine years after the grant of *Dīwanī* in A. D. 1765. The fact of the case in brief is as follows:

"Tulārāma, the plaintiff, claimed that Maninātha should restore him his domestic slave-girl of the name of Saito, daughter of the plaintiff's slave Mati. Tulārāma failed to prove his claim and the Judge Mm. Sacala Miśra delivered his judgment in favour of Maninātha who put forward evidences proving possession well over hundred years as required by law in respect of his proprietory right over the slave-girl."

Now, the fact that a title-suit was fought over the issue of the possession of a slave shows how deep-rooted the institution was. The judgment is quite in keeping with the traditions of the ancient legal texts, and can be compared with any of them. The Judge has quoted from the famous digest-writers and law-givers of Mithilā, *e. g.*, Misaru Miśra, Harinātha Upādhyāya and others. Subtle arguments on the issues of slave and slave-trade have been discussed and decided. This judgment shows how the actual administration in this respect was carried out in accordance with the law of the land.[18]

Concluding we must, bear in mind that the real status of a slave (generally called *Bahiā* in several deeds) is clear from the above documents. As we know from the contemporary social relationship existing between different classes of people, the slave had no social standing whatever. He was given a piece of land and in return he had to dedicate his life to the service of his master. The modesty of the slave-girl depended more or less on the goodwill of the slave owners. These slaves were responsible for the tilling of the land, sowing the seeds and reaping the harvests for their masters. Besides, they had to look to the comforts of their masters and it was because of their attachment to the masters that

17. JBORS, VI, pt. II (vide-Sacala Misra's judgement).

18. For details, see my paper, Op. cit.

there arose the necessity of registering their sale or purchase in the presence of a number of witnesses in addition to the title-suits. There is no doubt that the institution was one of vital importance in the economic set-up of the age when the slaves produced and others enjoyed the all-round comforts of life. The system continued to operate till the second decade of the twentieth century and still partially operates in the remote villages of Mithilā.

Economy

The economic condition of the people was on the whole satisfactory during the sixteenth and the middle of the seventeenth centuries A. D., but towards the end of Shah Jahan's reign the condition of the peasantry grew worse all over the country. They were subjected to harsh treatment at the hands of the provincial governors and local collectors. In Tirhut or Mithilā and other parts of the country highways became thoroughly unsafe and evils of pauperism increased widely. The Bañjārā menace proved chronic in Tirhut which could be suppressed only after years of efforts on the part of the provincial governors.[19] Under Aurangzeb the economic outlook of the country became all the more gloomy and the peasants, besides others, who formed the backbone of economic property as well as the industrial classes were afflicted with great sufferings. The evils increased further during the eighteenth century after the death of Aurangzeb which gave rise to disorders throughout the different parts of the country. The oppressive revenue administration, currency troubles, and the abuse of the extra-ordinary trade privileges by the English East India Company's servants throughout the Bengal Presidency of which Tirhut formed an important part—all combined to aggravate the troubles in the different economic spheres.[20]

The period after 1757 has been generally pictured as "the darkest age of Indian economic history".[21] The picture became more and more gloomy due to the devastating effects of the revenue farming system, *abwabs* and famines among agriculturists and inland trade-monopoly enjoyed by the Company of which the greater parts of the benefit were utilised for the benefit of their country. Added to it was the lawlessness borne out of wide spread unemployment due to the breakdown of the

---

19. For details see Bernier's Travels (1656-1668 A. D.), Constable's Trans, pp.230-31.
20. Sarkar and Datta, A text book of Modern Indian History, part-III, pp. 48-49.
21. R. C. Dutta, The Economic History of India under Early British Rule (Sixth Ed.), Preface.

central authority as a result of which the whole country became unsafe. This anarchy and insecurity desolated centres of agriculture and industry which were turned into series of jungles and stray villages. In the midst of these came the great famine of 1770 which, combined with rigorous exaction of revenues, produced untold miseries on the people of the Bengal Presidency and caused further desertions of holdings and depopulations of villages in Tirhut.[22]

About a hundred and ntnety-two years ago (c. 1770 A. D.) a great part of Darbhanga was uncultivated, partly due to the dislocation caused by the terrible famine of 1770 and partly due to the oppression of the farmers of revenue and the free-booting Zemindars. So terribly did the famine affect the people that in 1783 the Collector of Tirhut submitted a proposal that "cultivators should be attracted from the dominions of the Vizier of Oudh to reclaim the unpeopled wastes of this district" and in 1781 the Judge reported that "owing to the tyranny of the local revenue-officer and his subordinates there was but very little cultivation for twenty miles from Darbhanga and that grass-jungles appeared over expensive plains which before were rich in culture.[23]

In 1796 paragana Pachahi was described as "the abode of dreadful beasts of prey" while the adjoining paragana of Ālāpur (one of the richest parts of Darbhanga, now ravaged by the devastating floods of the Kośī river) was "the haunt of wild elephants whose depradations prevented all improvement."[24] Paragana Bharwāra which now comprises a considerable portion of the headquarters of the sub-division contained large stretches of waste land. In 1802 it was reported that "for miles nothing could be seen but uncultivated plains with here and there a few bighās under the plough."[25] With the establishment of law and order, by 1824 A. D., however, life boomed up once again in those jungle-tracts.

Thus, from the above it is clear that condition of the peasantry or ryots in Tirhut under the Khaṇḍavalās was not at all happy. A state of lawlessness prevailed. The Rājās of this dynasty had to fight several battles within and from without, which dangerously told upon the economy of the country. Besides several litigation-suits, claim-titles[26] etc. made the confusion worse confounded. Lord Minto's (Marquess of

22. R. C. Dutta, op. cit. Pref. vi-xxii.
23. Darbhanga District Gaz, p. 60.
24. Ibid; H. R. Ghosal, Economic transition, p. 257.
25. Ibid.
26. Moore, Indian Appeals, Vol. VII.

Hastings') frank observations on the occasion of decorating Chatra Siṁha with the title of *Mahārāja* are a clear manifestation of the fact that the ryots under him were not at all comfortable and happy and that he did not care to ameliorate the distressing condition of the people—a tenor of conduct which Lord Minto deprecated in strong terms.[27] He was honoured because of his loyalty to the Government and not because of his efficient administration and remedial measures. Besides, his help to the British government during the days of the Indo-Nepalese war cost the people much and in the regime of Mahārāja Rudra Simha the condition of the peasantry grew staggeringly awful. His predecessors had done nothing to arrest the process of this fast deterioration in the economic life of the people and he also proved unequal to the occasion. On the other hand, his extravagance in the form of digging of numerous tanks, building, temples and palaces and liberal patronage of scholars etc. fast accelerated the pace of economic disintegration. When Maharaja Maheśvara Siṁha came to the throne, the Rāj had already run into heavy debt. And, in its wake came to the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. He helped the government with all his means and resources which further administered a severe set-back to the already tottering economic structure of the country.

On his death, when the Court of Wards took charge of the Rāj, it was already 70 lakhs in debt. The first concern of the new management was, therefore, to recover the finances and to rehabilitate the country on sound economic footing. All possible sources of income were topped, new financial measures adopted and new taxes levied on the ryots. It is true that under this management the finances of the Raj recovered, but it is also ironically true that the backbone of the ryots who had to shoulder the burden of all these direct and indirect taxations, was so thoroughly broken that for centuries, the tongueless teeming millions were brutally crushed and were unable to raise their heads in pride. Moved by their distress, Mahārāja Lakṣmīsvara Siṁha, no doubt, tried his best to relieve them of their great sufferings, but his measures proved just like a few drops in the vast ocean. The condition of peasantry since then has been most distressing and deplorable. Moreover, the frequent floods and famines have thoroughly ravaged the land causing untold sufferings to the millions. No amount of measures

27. For details, see the Private Journal of the Marquess of Hastings.

and legislations have been sufficient to give them relief, in the true sense of the term.[28]

Another factor responsible for the sad state of affairs was the lack of personal energy and initiative among the husbandry. Infact, most of the agriculturists were involved in debt for, nearly half of the produce of their fields went towards the payment of rents. Sometimes the rent was so high as nine-sixteenth. Moreover, the difference in the price of grains in the month of *Pauṣa* (Dec.-Jan.) and *Āṣāḍha* (June-July) weighed heavily on the poor cultivators.[29] The high price of rice and paddy in *Āṣāḍha* compelled the more indigent ryots to procure these "either by a ruinous mortgage of the ensursng crop, or at an exorbitant rate of interest" from the village money-lenders (*Mahājanas*).[30] In *Pauṣa*, when the principal harvest was gathered they were under the necessity of immediately disposing of the produce of the fields to discharge the heavy instalments of their rent, or to pay off their debt. In this way, majority of them lived in perpetual indebtedness. Added to this was the naked barbarity and shame-faced tyranny of the petty Zemindars who literally bled them white and virtually fed fat on their carcass.

Floods and Famines

Mithilā or Tirhut may rightly be termed as the land of floods and famines. The abundance of rivers, while it certainly favoured agriculture, was also a cause of perpetual sorrow to the inhabitants of the land. It had to experience floods and famines which often were devastating in their effects, and the area liable to floods, roughly speaking, was the country between the Bāghamatī and the little Gaṇḍaka, the southern part of the Hajipur subdivision and the low-lying tract in the south-east of Darbhanga. Before 1894, a large part of the Hajipur sub-division was liable to flood but the repair of the Gaṇḍaka empankment insured the safety of this tract to a great extent. Besides, the Bāghamatī, the Kamalā and Kośi rivers have been notorious for floods and diseases. While Madhubani sub-division has been the worst victim to the unabating fury of the former, the district of Darbhanga (East), Saharsa, Purnea and Monghyr have been subjected to the horrible devastations caused by the latter, aptly described as "the

---

28. For details see the author's forthcoming book, History of Mithilā, Vol. II, chap. VI.
29. Asiatic Researches, XII, pp.554-55.
30. W. Hamilton, A Geographical Statistical & Historical descriptions of Hindostan, i, p. 35.

River of Sorrow". These two rivers alone halved the population of the areas af their visit and turned completely thousands of square miles, through floods and epidemics causing innumberable deaths, homelessness and starvation, into thick jungles, yet unclaimed. With the construction of the new embankments, however, these floods have abated to a considerable extent.

Famines in Tirhut, the land of abject poverty, have also been directly due to a deficiency in annual rainfall, but the intensity of such famines and the loss of lives caused by them were largely due to the chronic poverty of the people. If the people were generally in a prosperous condition, they could somehow or other make up for local failure of crops by purchases from neighbouring provinces, and there would be no loss of life. But, when the people are absolutely resourceless, they can not buy from surrounding tracts, and naturally they perish in hundreds or thousands or in millions whenever there is a total failure of crops.

The historians of Muhammedan period have left records of several famines of which some were very severe. The year of Akbar's accession to the throne (A. D. 1555-56) unfotunately coincided with one of the most awful famines ever recorded in the long list of Indian famines. This was followed by famines in 1573-74, 1583-84, 1595-96 and1630 during the Mughal period and twelve famines and four scarcities under the East India Company. Of these the famine of 1630 was one of the greatest that afflicted the whole of India, and Tirhut was one of the worst scenes of this devastating calamity whence thousands of people seem to have migrated from one place to another due to the great famine[31]. As a matter of fact hardly a year passedwithout the record of some disastrous inundation. Thus, floods and famines have been strangely associated with one another chronologically in Mithilā. In 1785 there was famine, in 1788 flood; in 1866 there was scarcity, in 1867 flood; in 1871 there was flood, in 1883 famines; in 1884 there was flood, in 1875 scarcity; in 1897 there was famine and in 1898 flood, and so on and so forth.

But the earliest famine in the time of the East India Company of which we possess a detailed record is that of 1769-70 which took an usually heavy toll of life which affected the population of Tirhut so dangerously that it was reduced to only 18,44,309.[32] The famine and the small pox made their appearance at one and the same time and

31. Cf. S. H. Askari's paper in JBRS, xxxii, p. 61, fn, 5.

32. Cf. the Collector's letters to the Revenue Board, 27 May 1790 and 17 Oct, 1791 in JBRS, XXXIX, pp. 365-66.

raged so violently for full three months together that vast multitudes were swept away, "nor can their number be known but to Him that is hidden or invisible. Whole villages and whole towns were swept away by these scourges, and they suddenly disappeared from the face of the earth......This famine desolated the whole country of Bahar (Bihar) as well as the whole kingdom of Bengal."[33] The husbandmen sold their everything, they even sold their sons and daughters till atlength no buyer of children could be found. They ate the leaves of the trees and the grass of the field, and...the living were feeding on the dead".[34]

As against this, it is undoubtedly extremely painful to read of the rigorous collection of the land-tax during years of human sufferings and deaths, perhaps unexampled in the history of mankind, of which any description could be an exaggeration. The mortality was heightened by the action of the Company's servants. Their *Gomastas* not only monopolised the grain in order to make high profits from the distress of the people, but they compelled the cultivators to sell even the seed requisite for the next harvest. The Court of Directors were so indignant that they hoped that "the most exemplary punishment had been inflicted upon all offenders who could dare counter-act the benevolence of the Company and entertain a thought of profiting by the universal distress."[35] But inspite of this "benevolence of the Company" we hear of no abatement of the land-tax, although one-third of the population had been swept away and one third of the lands had returned to waste. According to Philip Francis, "atleast two-thirds of the whole surface of Bengal and Bihar are in a state of total depopultion".[36]

The tragedy was so great and horrifying that the undying recollection of this famine found expressions in one of the most touching verses of Sir John Shore (afterwards Lord Teignmouth and Governor-General of India) who had landed in Calcutta when the famine had already begun. Of the entire records this is perhaps the only non-official description by an eye-witness :

"Still fress in memory's eye the scene I view,
The shrivelled limbs, sunk eyes and lifeless hue,
Still hear he mother's shrieks and infant's moans,
Cries of despair and agonizing moans,

33. Ghulam Hussain, Siyar Vol. III, pp. 25-26 (Trans).
34. W. W. Hunter, Annals of Rural Bengal. p. 420.
35. Ibid, pp. 26-27; 19 fn 5, 20 fn 16, 19-23 & 24-26.
36. Sellect Committee's Eleventh Report, 1783, App.O.

In wild confusion dead and dying lie,
Hark to the Jackal's yell and Vulture's cry,
The dog's fell howl, as midst the glare of day,
They riot unmolested on their prey !
Dire scenes of horror, which no pen can trace,
Nor rolling years from memory's page efface"[37]

Another tragic after-effect of this calamity was that before the commencement of 1771, one-third of a generation of peasants had been swept from the face of the earth and the whole generation of once rich families had been reduced to indigence. Every district reiterated the same tale. The revenue farmer—a wealthy class who then "stood forth as the visible government to the common people—being unable to realize the land-tax were stripped of this office; their persons imprisoned and their lands, the sole dependence of their families re-let".[38] Thus, from the year 1770 the ruin of the two-thirds of the aristocracy of Lower Bengal (of the then Bengal Presidency) dates.

A hundred years later Mithilā or Tirhut was afflicted with another great famine (1873-74), besides others in between. Its wide spread nature can be judged from the fact that Maithila folk bards recorded the event and sang it from door to door. The *Akālī Kavitta* by one Fatur Lal, a Maithila Brāhmaṇa (c. 1881) of village Shahpur (Darbhanga), in Maithilī is worth noticing in this connection. It is a description of the famine of the Fasli year 1281 (1873-74 and was written by a man of the people. It is worth noting this fact, for it praises both the English and the Mahārāja of Darbhanga in no unmeasured tone. It speaks of native population in tones of grim satire...; that it chimes with the feelings of the people is shown by its immense popularity with the lower orders...and a lively gratitude is felt in the hearts of the people of Tirhut for the efforts of the Government and the Darbhanga Rāj in the disastrous year 1874. The poet describes the distress of the famine and at the same time gives a satirical description of the "sinners" (the *Mahājans, Māliks, Moharirs* etc.) during the famine in a scintillating style in Maithili mixed with several Braja forms.[39]

Four periods of scarcity—1876, 1886-87, 1889-90, and 1892—intervenen between this famine and that of 1896-97. By a moderate cal-

37. Cf. Memoir of the life and correspondence of John Lord Teignmouth; by his son, Vol. I, pp. 25-26 (London, 1843).

38. Ibid, 56-57; App. B. pp. 399-422, App. A, pp. 379-98.

39. For the verses see G.A. Grierson, Maithili Chrestomathy; Also cf. J.K. Mishra, "Introduction to the Folk literature of Mithilā in University of Allahabad studies, 1950, pp. 39-40; Memoria, p. 155; IGI, Vol. III, p. 488

culation it has been estimated that the famines of 1877-78, of 1889 and 1892, of 1897 and 1900 have carried off fifteen millions of people. In other words, population equal to about half of that of England, has perished in India which, men and women, still in their old age, remember.

But of all these famines, the famine of 1896-97 was the greatest to which Tirhut, particularly Muzafferpur was exposed in the nineteenth century. It effected almost every province, and the famine mortality came to 7,50,000.[40]

Thus, floods and famines have been peculiarly associated with one another in Mithilā. Though famines have now become less frequent owing to the timely precautionary measures by the Government, floods have been more frequent and devastating in their nature in recent years. For the last few years however, Mithilā has been passing through chronic food-crisis and scarcity conditions. The droughts, failure of monsoon and other natural calamities have brought about famine or near-famine conditions, giving a fillip to the tremendous rise in food-prices, from which there seems to be no escape in near future.[41]

Trade and Industry

Facilities for smooth communication have been the lifeblood of prospective trade throughout the ages. Since the land was intersected by nearly twenty rivers and many lakes, trade in Mithilā was in a prosperous condition and there were numerous land and river-routes to carry articles to and from different places. Since the beginning of the Christian era and even earlier, Mithilā had been carrying on trade, both in exports and imports, with different parts of the country. In the mediaeval period she had her commercial transactions with Dacca and Murshidabad. In the beginning of the seventeenth century, however, foreign migrants—the Dutch, the, Portuguese the French and the English —established themselves first in Bengal and then in Tirhut. The advent of these new elements had a tremendous effect on agriculture and industry of Tirhut. Several articles—sugarcane, tobacco, pepper etc—now came to be produced on a large scale from purely commercial point of view. Agriculture, in a sense now became commercialised and with the commercialisation of agriculture, the foreign merchants encouraged

---

40. K. C. Ghosh, Famine in Bengal, pp. 202 03; Memoria, op. cit. p. 155; IGI, Vol.III, p. 491.
41. For other details regarding famines and prices of food-stuff, problem of labour etc. See Thakur, History of Mithilā, Vol. II, Chap. VI (M.S.)

the cultivation of costic soda and indigo-plants. Various articles were now exported to Nepal and Bhutan from Tirhut through land-routes and to Bengal, Magadh and the United Provinces (Uttara-Pradeśa) through rivers. Tirhut in return imported several articles from outside.[42]

Extensive trade between Mithilā and Nepal, Bhutan, Bengal, Western India, and other parts of the country was in a very flourishing condition and the commodities included mainly salt, nuts, spices, sugar, tobacoo, cotton-goods, woollen clothes, bright stones, woods, rice, lion-skin, paddy, silk-cloth, pulse, jute, vermillion, *mal-mal*, opium, shawl, paper, horses, Khādi (*Kokaṭī*) and many other articles exported to and imported from those parts on a large scale.

From the beginning to the end of the nineteenth century the condition of trade in Mithilā was almost the same as in the preceding period. Most of the trade was carried through rivers. Indigo and salt-petre formed the chief exportable commodities during this period. The introduction of the Railways in 1894 gave further lease of life to the export trade, and *Khala* (untanned leather) assumed more importance in the changed condition. The extensive volume of trade resulted in the establishment of several trade-centres on the bank of the Gaṇḍaka of which Hajipur, Lalganj, Bagaha, Govindapur and Sattaraghat were most important. Besides these, there were several marts and trade-centres on the bank of other rivers—Darbhanga and Kamataul on the bank of the Bāghmatī; Khagaria, Rosera, Pusa, Samastipur and Muzaffarpur on the bank of the little Gaṇḍaka; Raniganj, Nawabganj, Nathpur, Sahebganj, Rajganj, Rampur, Aliganj, Khawaspur and others on the bank of Kośī; Dulalganj, Kaliyaganj, Devaganj, Krishnaganj, Bahadurganj, Barsai, Khiderpur, Tipajani, English Bazar, Mahishmardini, Sukrabari, Bagharia, etc. on the Mahānandā and Kausat, Pokhariya, Shibganj, etc. on the bank of the Gaṅgā and several others on the banks of the tributaries of these rivers. Of these, however, Rosera, Darbhanga, Khagaria, Shibganj, Nathpur, Lalganj, Raniganj, Nawabganj, Karogola, Kantanagar, Bhawanipur, Dulalganj, Devaganj and Krishnaganj were the most flourishing trade-centres which exported and imported lacs of mounds of commodities consisting chiefly of sugar, oilseeds, tobacoo, pepper, wheat, betel nuts, rice and salt. Rosera imported 2,52,519 mounds in 1872; 1,92,082 mounds in 1873 and 1,85,044 mounds in 1874. Darbhanga came next to Rosera. It exported 1,55,132, 1,07,114, and 1,85,356 mounds and imported 1,15,342, 1,22,779 and 1,02,531 maunds in 1872, 1873 and 1874 respectively.[43]

42. Vidyapati Singh, Mithilā Ka Udyoga O Vyāpāra, pp. 66-67.
43. Hunter, XIII, 145-46.

Khagaria enjoyed the same importance in North Monghyr as did Rosera in Darbhanga. Nathnagar, Shibnagar, Khanjarpur and Mehdinagar in Bhagalpur occupied prominent places in having the largest number of shops. But in the latter half of the nineteenth century Nathpur was destroyed due to the havoc caused by the devastating Kośī floods and in 1868 Shibganj bazar was completely destroyed on account of the beds of the Kalababaya river, an offshoot of the Gaṅgā.[44] So were others in the following centuries due to sharp decline in industry and subsequent desertion and destruction of most of these centres because of the deliberate ingnorance of the Company's government, and highhandedness of their servants coupled with the innumberable visits of floods and famines.

The trade of Mithilā or North Bihar was thus chiefly both in exports and imports. As noted above, the exports included indigo, oilseeds, saltpetre, untanned leather (hides), ghee, tobacoo, rice, wheat, pulses, *makai*, woods, opium, sugar, *Gur*, jute, fruits, *Kokatī* (Khādi) cloths, fruits, vegetables, fishes etc. These products found their way chiefly to Patna and Calcutta. Some commodities *eg.*, tobacco, were sent to western India also. The imports consisted of English cloths, salt, *Jawar* (millet), *bajra*, pulses, indigo-seed, cotton, jute and spices (mostly from Patna and Calcutta by ferry-boats). In addition to these, rice was imported from Dinajpur, Maldah, Murshidabad, Gorakhpur and Oudh; *Jawar* and *bajra* from Oudh and South Bihar; indigo-seed from Kanpur and Allahabad Doab and sugar candy from Kalpi.

From industrsal point of view Mithilā had been self-sufficient from times immemorial. Cottage industry played an important part in the economic life of the people. Different sections of the society were engaged in different small-scale industries. In later times, however, especially during the British period, these indigenous industries lost the patronage of the State and died out their natural death. The import of foreign goods and manufactures was zealously encouraged by the East India Company at the cost of the country's ruination. The cumulative effects of this anti-indigenous trade-policy was that the localised industry could not stand in the keen competition and was soon wiped out.

The cottage industry of Mithilā consisted mainly of (i) the manufacture of fine pots and utensils which was in a flourishing condition till the end of the nineteenth century; (ii) manufacture of different colours for which raw materials were available in abundance. The industries were decentralised in Mithilā and hundreds of families

44. JBORS, XXIX, pts i-ii, p. 107; Hunter, XIV. 22, 31.

engaged in them were wholly dependant on its income. When cheap colours began to be imported from Belgium these small-scale cottage industries could not keep pace with it and were unable to stave off extinction towards the beginning of the twentieth century; (iii) manufacture of vermillion *(Sindūra)* which was an important industry of Purnea. But the establishment of the East India Company soon spelt its doom for want of protection ftom the home government, as well as its import from abroad;[45] (iv) manufacture of jute-bags was an important industry in the Kishenganj sub-division of the Purnea district which exported jute-bags worth lacs of rupees to other parts of the country. It was subsequently replaced by a jute-factory; (v) manufacture of paper. This industry was in a flourishing condition in Kishenganj in which a section of the Muslims were engaged who were known as *Kagajiyā* till about 1877 A. D.[46] But the establishment of paper mills on modern lines outside Mithilā dealt a fatal blow to this erstwhile industry of the land.[47]

Similarly in Tirhut, Khagaria, Kishenganj and Khagra were famous for their brass and bell metal utensils; Kharagpur for its silver ornaments; Lalganj for its carpentry; Monghyr for its ebony work and guns; Madhubani for weaving; Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur and Champaran for salt-petre and Purnea for its *bidar* (pewter inlaid with silver). All these were carried on by the hereditary artisans at their own workshops either in their homes or small huts before the Fnglish came.[48]

The impure saline composition named *Khari* was manufactured in considerable quantities, not far from the Gagṅā, about eight miles from Singia. The saline earth from which it was made was called *rehu* and effloresces, found in several paraganas in the district of Tirhut and Saran, and was scraped together and collected at the surface. It was subsequently procured by burning and lixivation.[49] Gradually this gave rise to a prosperous salt business which was later monopolised by the East India Company (3rd June, 1789).

The weaving af cotton goods formed the principal manufacturing industry of Tirhut. Purnea was the chief centre of the manufacture of silk-cloth and Darbhanga was one of the few districts of the old Bengal Presidency where cotton-weaving was still comparatively an important

---

45. Hunter, XV. 354.
46. Ibid, 358-59.
47. Ibid, XIV, 354; Purnea Re;ort, 520.
48. HEB. p. 327.
49. W. Hamilton, The East India Gazetteer (1828 ed.), Vol. II, p. 662.

industry. Madhubani was a famous centre of the manufacture of *m lmol* cloth, and its *kokaṭī malmal* or *addhi malmal* (khadi-silk) had a distinct place of its own in the popular markets of India and abroad. Even foreign cloths of high quality paled into insignificance in comparison with this most popular cloth of Mithilā.

The cloth derived its name from the species of cotton of which it was made—*Kokaṭi-bāṅga* cotton (gossypium herbaccum)which was indigenous to the sub-division. The cloth turned out was naturally of a brown colour, resembling *tusser* silk, both in colour and texture. It is said that the best quality equalled, if it did not surpass, good brown Holland, and that it could well be worn as a summer dress. The cloth was very durable, smooth, glossy and of a fine texture. The manufacture was tragically allowed to languish for want of state patronage and also owing to the competition of the mill piece-goods.

Purnea prepared white *malmal* which was also known as *Khas.* The Resident of the East India Company made advances to the weavers and purchased a large quantity of *Khas* to carry their trade. Later traders from Murshidabad and Calcutta adopted the same tactics and made their purchases. The cost of one *thāna* of this *Khas* varied between Rs. 6/- and Rs. 15/-.[50]

Coarser and middling sorts were made in Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur, Champaran and Purnea. These were comparatively more durable and cheaper.[51] The introduction of foreign cheap cloths and the anti-attitude of the East India Company government soon adversely affected this eastwhile flourishing industry of Tirhut.[52]

The decline of this industry had a serious repercussion over a great part of the country. It nearly amounted to an economic revolution during the first phase of the 19th century and caused a serious dislocation in the socio-economic structure of the country. Apart from multitude of weavers and spinners, many other classes of people like the dyers, the bleachers, the cotton-beaters and the needle-workers were thrown out of employment. Great manufacturing centres turned to be mere shadows of what they once had been. "The sympathy of the Court is deeply executed by the Report of the Board of Trade exhibiting the gloomy picture of the effects of a commercial revolution, productive

50. Purnea Report, 542, For the causes of its deterioation, see H.R. Ghosal, Economic Transition, pp. 55-58, Chap II.

51. Purnea Report, 543-44; Hunter, XIII, 83-84, 263,

52. Ghosal, op. cit. p. 45; R. C. Dutt. p. 255.

of so much present sufferring to numerous classes in India, and hardly paralleled in the history of commerce".[53]

The *Swadeshi* movement, vigorously launched and encouraged by the Indian National Congress, however, once again revived this dying indigenous industry. A new life was infused and the spinning wheel (*Charkhā*) and *takalī* found an honourable place in almost all the houses of Mithilā. Consequently *Khādi*-centres were established and organised at Madhubani, Pandaul, Kamataul and other places. But the big gap in the prices of *Khādi* and mill-made cloths soon affected this industry adversely. It is, however, gratifying to find that popular government are once again sparing no efforts to put this industry on par with other important industries of the country.

Opium

Among the major industries of the nineteenth century the following deserve special mention—opium, sugar, Indigo, and salt-petre, and among the subsidiary industries jute, tobacoo, mixed cloth, woollen cloth, carpentry and other small industries such as paper-making, soap-making and glass manufacture were in a flourishing condition till as late as the early part of the 20th century.

Poppy was grown nearly all over Mithilā and the Company established several factories in Tirhut subordinate to their opium factory at Patna. In Tirhut the opium factories were situated at Bidupur (about seven miles east of Hajipur), Lalganj (about twelve miles north-west of Hajipur), Darbhanga and Barnawada (Begni Nawada, about twenty miles east of Darbhanga town).[54] Each of these factories had a number of smaller stations under it. These out-factories and lesser establishments were managed by the Indian servants, subject to the supervision and control of the Opium Agent at Patna or (from 1816 A. D.) of the Deputy Opium Agents in the districts.

The cultivation of poppy had never been widely practiced in south of Darbhanga. Its place was taken by its rival, tobacoo. the greater part of the opium grown in the district came from the Benipathi Thana. It covered an area of about 2,400 acres, but the price obtained for the crude opium rendered it a very valuable crop. The production of opium was a government monopoly, and no person was allowed to

53. H. R. Ghosal, op. cit. p. 45.
54. H. R. Ghosal, op. cit. pp. 124 25.

grow poppy except on account of Government.[55] A few years later its production began to decrease as it became less and less profitable to the ryots. It was then substituted by more robust cereals or such paying crops as sugarcane, potatoes, chillies, and vegetables.

Sugar

The soil of Tirhut has been quite congenial to the cultivation of candy. It was grown, as now, on a large scale in the districts of Champaran, Muzaffarpur and Darbhanga and the industry was in a highly flourishing condition during this period. Of the various factories established in Tirhut, the most important was the factory at Motipur (18 Miles north-west of Muzaffarpur town), established by the Dutch in 1789.[56] In those days the main industry of the Europian planters was sugar, and not indigo.

About 1850 A. D. there were 86 factories in the districts of Darbhanga and Muzaffarpur but most of these factories had to incur losses and were either wound up in the course of a few years or converted in to indigo *Kuthis* (factories). The dying sugar-industry was, however, revived by the India Development Company with the result that in the first half of the twentieth centuries many new factories came into existence and there are fourteen sugar factories now operating in Mithilā.

Indigo

Indigo was a product of North Bihar long before the advent of the British.[57] It appears that first English factory founded in this part of the country between 1650 and 1700 A. D. was at Singia or Lalganj. It was a salt-petre factory and was established inspite of the unhealthy climate of Singia, as it was close to salt-petre area and removed from the interference of the Nawab or his deputies at Patna, and still not far from it where the Chief of the Bihar establishment lived.

As the British demand for Indian indigo revived after the American source was closed on the outbreak of the American War of Independence (1775-83), indigo became forthwith a profitable articles of export of the English Company from India.

55. Vide Report of the Regional Record Survey Committee, Bihar, 1954-55, p. 39.
56. H. R. Ghosal; 70-71.
57. Sir George Walt, The Commercial Products of India. (1908 ed.), Pp. 668-69; W. H. Curey, Good Old Days of the Hon'ble John Company, Vol. I, pp. 208-12, Vol. II, pp. 389-404 (1906. ed.).

The cultivation of indigo on European method in Mithilā was, however, started by F. Grand, the first collector of Tirhut in 1782 A. D. and since then it gradually developed into a big industry, increasing in extent and importance.[58] From a statement of 1802 A. D. we learn that there were then in the district 13 planters, of whom one was Indian, 4 Englishmen, 1 Scotch, 4 Irishmen, 1 German and 2 Italians with 16 indigo factories, holding 596 bighas of land. By 1810 A. D. the number of indigo concerns had shot up to 25, besides those in Champaran and other places. In 1828 the pendulum had swung back, and indigo plantation had so greatly increased in Tirhut that certain restrictions were suggested by the Collector for the peace and welfare of the district. In Champaran the industry was seriously threatened in 1867-68 due to violent clashes between the cruel planters and the helpless cultivators and the state of chaos and lawlessness engendered by the former was soon brought to an end by several legislations by the government through the efforts of Mahatma Gandhi.[59] Thus, in Purnea, Champaran, North Bhagalpur and North Monghyr (Begusarai sub-divition), several indigo-factories were established. About 1810 A. D. over 77 factories were founded in Purnea; in North Bhagalpur, indigo-cultivation covered an area of 10,000 acres of land and in Begusarai there were five indigo-concerns at work in 1869 A. D., covering 20, 500 bighas of land. In the twentieth century, however this industry was confined only to Begusarai and indigo-cultivation was later substituted by other crops.[60]

In 1896 Germany introduced its cheap synthetic (indigo) dye into the world market and the natural indigo-industry of Tirhut received a serious set-back. It was, however, revived towards the close of 1914 A. D., when the German synthetic dye was shut out by the war and in 1915 A. D. the English had several indigo factories in Darbhanga district alone. But the pace could not be kept up for long and few years after, this industry of Tirhut was also completely destroyed.

The condition of the tenants of Darbhanga and Muzaffarput engaged in this industry was as extremely deplorable as that of their counterparts in Bettiah or Champaran. The indigo-planters used to take lease or *thīkā* of the whole or part of a plot from Zamindars and then forced the tenants to cultivate indigo there at the cost of their existence.

58. Stevenson Moore, Settlement Report of the Muzaffarpur Distt, 1892-99, Paras 867-75.

59. I have dealt with this problem separetely in my forthcoming book, History of Mithilā, Vol II, Chap. II.

60. G. D. College Bulletin series, No. 3. pp. 11-12.

This highhandedness and naked tyranny frequently resulted in violent clashes between the white planters and the ryots, causing immense sufferings to the latter. Whenever the tenants refused to do indigo-cultivation, the planters forcibly took possession of their land and sowed indigo with the help of their own men. This is a gruesome tale of white barbarity of which it is hard to find a parallel elsewhere.

Salt-petre

The industrial importance of Mithilā during this period and earlier was due to salt-petre manufacture. Till the middle of the eighteenth century the Dutch and the French were the rivals of the English in this trade. But after the battle of Plassey the English Company became the sole monopolists till fhe year 1814.[61]

Out of the five English salt-petre factories in Bihar, two—Singia and Mow—were situated in Tirhut.[62] But Singia met it doom at the hands of the cruel Gaṇḍaka which flowed by its side and unfortunately to-day we have no trace of it. Mow was situated in paragana Belagucha in Tirhut. Soon, however, this flourishing industry also received a serious set-back as there was a gradual falling down in the prices of salt-petre and the European merchants stopped making further investments in this business. The *nunias*, engaged in this business, later gave it up due to the illegal exactions of the government. The policy of the government hit the manufactures hard and broke the backbone of this flourishing industry and it completely disappeared from the land by the first decade of the twentieth century.

Among the subsidiary industries the cultivation of jute and tobacoo was prominent. While in Purnea and Saharsa jute crop was grown on a large scale; in Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur and Monghyr tobacoo crop was grown extensively, and a tobacoo-factory was for the first time started at Pusa (Muzaffarpur) where cigars and tobacoo were manufactured on European model. Another tobacoo - factory was started at Dalsingsarai (Samastipur) which does not exist now.[63] Tobacoo is still grown in Tirhut but the increasing restrictions and conditions imposed by the Government have now seriously hampered the growth of this industry. Among other industries the manufacture of mixed cloth, woollen cloth, carpentry, paper-making, soap-making, match-factory etc. flourished more or less as cottage industries.

61. JBRS, XXXVII, pts. iii-iv, p. 48.
62. H. R. Ghosal, p. 142. 138-43.
63. MUV. pp. 61 62

The above survey makes it quite clear that Mithilā or Tirhut was once an important centre of various economic activities. It had carved out a place of distinction in the world of import and export trade and its goods were welcomed and honoured for their quality even in the highly industrialised centres of the western market. But, the policy of killing the goose that lay the golden eggs dealt a fatal blow to the numerous branches of the flourishing indigenous industry which was soon wiped off its existence.
